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WINTER BIRDS OF NEW ONTARIO, AND OTHER
NOTES ON NORTHERN BIRDS.

BY G. EIFRIG.

BROADLY speaking, New Ontario comprises all the vast territory between Lakes Superior and Huron and Hudson Bay; and between Manitoba in the west and the longitude of Lake Nipissing in the east. In a narrower and more common sense, however, New Ontario means the land along the new provincial railroad from North Bay, on the northeast shore of Lake Nipissing, to Matheson, near Lake Abitibi in the north. This road is to be extended to the projected Transcontinental Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, and afterwards even to James Bay. Along this railway the rich veins of silver have been discovered, which have drawn

so many into these northern wilds and have made towns spring up like mushrooms, the most noted of which is Cobalt, from which the whole region sometimes receives the same name. Into this district I had occasion to go in the middle of last March and to stay about two weeks in the various places along the railroad. And as bird lists from this locality are few and far between, especially of winter birds, the few notes I made may not be amiss. Nor is the list a very extended one, but the very paucity of birds tells its own peculiar story.

As I left Ottawa the first large flocks of Crows were piling in on the fields from the south. Only fields having a decided southern slope showed places free from snow. In most places it was still rather deep, so the Crows were not entering a land of plenty. At North Bay I saw only four newly arrived Crows.

It may seem strange to call birds seen in the end of March winter birds. But such they were. For the region north of North Bay was to all intents and purposes still in the middle of winter. Only the lengthening days and the intensity of the sun's rays made it certain that the end of winter could not be far off. Otherwise there was snow everywhere, none had melted so far; the rivers and lakes were still used as highways for the teams hauling supplies to the mines and lumber camps, as much as earlier in the winter.

The first winter bird I saw was a Raven (*Corvus corax principalis*) at Englehart, 138 miles north of North Bay. I was told that several had been seen at Larder Lake, about 15 miles northeast, all winter. The thermometer stood at 6° above zero in the afternoon, during the night it must have been 10°-25° below. The north wind was intensely cold. Right in the path of its icy blasts a bunch of jolly Chickadees (*Parus atricapillus*) were gamboling in some pines, singing their soft, *Peabody*.

At Brentha P. O., 5 miles west of Heaslip station — most of these names are not yet on maps — I had a unique experience with a Canada Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*). A Swiss settler told me, that near his little primitive cabin, that he had built for himself in the wilderness, was a 'meat bird,' which would come to him when called and eat out of his hand. I said, I would come next morning and take its picture. He said, it perhaps would not come when seeing a stranger there or not stay on his hand long enough.

I said, I would try. When I reached his cabin, he was not at home, but, according to his wish, I went in, took some breakfast food — rolled oats — in my hand, went out and called the name the owner of the cabin had divulged to me. Imagine my surprise when out of a spruce thicket in a hollow before the cabin a Canada Jay came and without much ado flew on my extended hand and ate to his heart's content, as though we had known each other for years. Then he took some in his bill and flew back to the thicket, where he undoubtedly fed his mate, incubating the eggs. Of course, the name had nothing to do with its coming, it came also without being called; the food was all it cared for. I set my kodak on a wood pile, near where I had stood and got some more eatables. The Jay came again, flew on my hand, eyed me a little and then fell to eating again. With my right hand I took its picture twice, while feeding on the left. They proved failures, however, since the bird was too close to the camera for a snap shot. Shortly after the owner came, who was not a little astonished at my story, and I then took some better pictures of the bird on his hand.

On the way back to Heaslip I saw about 15 Chickadees and one Hairy Woodpecker (*Dryobates villosus leucomelas*), *i. e.*, if that form is really the Ontario one, and not true *villosus*.

At Kingersdorf, 8 miles north of Englehart, whereto I walked in the teeth of a fiercely cold north wind, there were a few Snowflakes (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) about the cabin of the man after whom the new station had been named. A flock of about 25 of these, I saw on Lake Temiskaming at the town of Haileyburg.

The English Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), while already established at Cobalt, had not yet penetrated far enough north to reach Englehart. It was rather a relief to be for once in a sparrowless town. But no doubt, they are there now.

At Latchford, south of Cobalt and Englehart, I saw a flock of Redpolls (*Acanthis linaria*), and in an open place in the Montreal River, at the rapids near the railway bridge three Golden-eyes (*Clangula americana*).

And finally, at New Liskeard, I again saw the vanguard of first spring migrants here, a flock of Crows, which I had left behind at North Bay, flying due north.

These are all the birds I saw in this northland. Could I have

gone into the woods, I might have encountered, if luck had favored me, the two Three-toed and the Pileated Woodpeckers, the Canada Ruffed and Spruce Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus togata et Canachites canadensis*), possibly also the Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Pediocetes phasianellus*), and the Hawk and Great Gray Owls. It must be admitted that the winter bird-life of New Ontario is not a very conspicuous one.

Great Horned Owl *versus* Porcupine.—In December, 1907, a *Bubo virginianus* was brought to me, which had been shot on the 19th at Inlet, Labelle Co., Quebec, 50 miles northeast of Ottawa. It proved to be a remarkable specimen from the fact that it bore palpable evidence of having had an encounter with a porcupine, shortly before it was shot. It was liberally sprinkled over with quills, especially on the sole of the right foot — the quills having penetrated even that horny skin — under the right wing, on the breast, neck, and even two in the left eye-lid. Some of the quills had pierced the thick, solid muscles of the breast, lying against the sternum. Fifty-six quills and parts of quills were extracted from the skin and flesh, and about ten left in. How did this owl come to tackle such an undesirable antagonist or prey? The probability is, that the owl was foraging for food, and, being very hungry — probably a not uncommon experience for them in these northern woods — swooped down on the first moving object that even remotely appeared like legitimate prey, and, in her eagerness and possibly by reason of darkness in the woods, did not find out her mistake until she had reached forward with one claw and gotten that full of spines, simultaneously receiving also a slap from the tail of the porcupine, that lodged the rest of the little barbed spears in her anatomy.

Most of the hawks and owls received here in winter have empty stomachs, showing that hunger must be a frequent, if disagreeable experience with them. At such times the gall seems to discharge more copiously into the stomach, as it and the intestines are in such cases very green. Probably a way nature adopts to somewhat relieve the pain of hunger.

There is an old established breeding colony of Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax naevius*) on Kettle Island near

Ottawa. However, birds in the adult plumage are almost never seen, but any number of young in August and September. Mr. E. White broke this monotony by securing two adult males, Sept. 10, 1907, in a little swampy woods, near the city limits.

The appearances of Brünnich's Murre (*Uria lomvia*) south of their breeding range, are for most localities, when they are seen at all, put down as being of infrequent or at least very irregular occurrence. Here at Ottawa, however, it may be called a regular event. For quite a number of years past, they have come every November, usually in the second half of the month, *e. g.*, in 1907 the first came Nov. 25 and the last Dec. 8. They usually appear during high easterly winds, coming from the direction of the wind and succumb in numbers to the guns of the habitues of the river, mostly French-Canadians. It is difficult to secure specimens, however, for many are quickly bought up by people desiring to have them mounted as ornaments for their parlors, and the rest are plucked and *caten* by the successful hunters.

Adult males of all three Scoters, *Oidemia americana*, *deglandi* and *perspicillata*, have this fall (1908), in September and October, been taken near Ottawa, which is a very unusual occurrence, especially as regards the first named. One of these was secured by Mr. G. White for his collection, and one of the last was seen by the writer in the hands of a taxidermist, Oct. 28.

A still greater rarity was secured Nov. 2 by Mr. Bedard, the rifle-range keeper, who on that date took four young King Eiders (*Somateria spectabilis*). They were in the company of two adult males, which were wary enough to escape. One of them is now in my collection, two in that of the Fisheries Museum, and the fourth in the collection of Mr. E. White. This is the first record for this species from this neighborhood.